

Flood News ~ Clean Up & Recovery ~ April 28, 2026

I use words for a living, and I'm pretty good at it, but the last few weeks have left me struggling to find words to describe what we've lived through together.

Reading this morning that our students in the Shiocton school district were out from April 15th through April 27th somehow just solidified these recent days in a way they hadn't been before. In the middle of a crisis, time doesn't have a lot of meaning. Many folks who were with me in the work of coordinating a response had trouble remembering what day it was. We took to putting up a sign in the shelter that announced the day, date, weather, and meals each day.

To call it a flood of biblical proportion isn't an exaggeration. The Wolf River's defined flood stage is 11 feet. On April 17th, the river was at 15.1 feet. It turned Shiocton and our surrounding rural areas into lakes. Even by the time I drove some of our shelter guests home on the 23rd, what should have been cabbage fields and the airport were lakes with white caps and fish swimming in them. Streets in town are drying, but some in lower lying areas are still under water.

We've made it through the evacuation and the immediate crisis, but now the long-term work begins, the hard clean up and assessment of damages, asking what can and can't be saved. Everywhere there will be mold to deal with, even in houses that didn't flood, because there is simply so much water on the ground, and in the air.

I suppose that right now, my task should be to reflect on how we got through the evacuation and immediate crisis.

A lot of folks from aid organizations who came to our communities were amazed by what we did, how we pulled together in a matter of hours and days, to mobilize all kinds of help. I am not in the least surprised because this is who I know us to be, who I expect us to be.

Small soapbox rant here ... rural America often gets dismissed as unsophisticated or technologically behind or something. Maybe that's true. We might only be about half an hour from both Green Bay and Appleton, but the

psychological distance is more like hundreds of miles, and we like it that way. We like our country life. We're farmers, and factory workers, and truckers, and teachers, and families. We're only just now really getting good broadband internet access, and there are still more than a few places where the cell phones just don't work. But y'all need us because we're the people who, during the covid crisis, made your toilet paper and your food, and kept trucks running to deliver all your stuff. End rant.

We did what rural folks always do, in the US and everywhere ~ we stuck together because that's who we know we can depend on. We couldn't wait for the powers and systems to move the machinery of their organizations, so we did it ourselves.

On Wednesday the 15th, one of the churches I serve, St. John's U.C.C. Black Creek, opened its doors as Red Cross evacuation shelter. Cindy Meulemans and the Salvation Army Bread of Life Center (our town's food pantry) mobilized food for that night in shelter and we worked together to coordinate meals for folks in the coming days. We worked with Jenni Court and the Black Creek Fire and Rescue to figure out what we needed for the clean up that would be ahead, and to find a place to put the donations that were already coming in by Thursday afternoon.

I cannot say enough about how amazing it was to work with these two women, all of us in it not for ourselves, but for the people and communities we love, knowing that if the rains had come differently, it could well have been our homes that were flooded.

We ended up with twelve guests in our shelter for eight nights. We organized showers, again at the fire department, and laundry pick up thanks to one of our church members. Volunteers to prepare meals came from everywhere ~ groups like the Wolf River Beavers 4H who made lasagna (and gave us some much needed laughter with terribly bad puns included with each meal), to the Hotel Seymour, and a food truck with hamburgers and hot dogs. Individuals and churches, and the wonderful folks from the Salvation Army who came to do breakfast every morning (being good farm folk, we had a lot of eggs donated).

I could go on for years thanking folks, and I'd still miss someone. I will never tire of talking about the incredible ways our communities worked together to meet this moment, every one of us knowing that when one of us is hurting, all of us hurt together.

Maybe I should just do the math.

At church:

12 shelter guests

8 nights in shelter

320+ meals (because we fed the shelter volunteers too)

1 TV channel in the church basement thanks to a borrowed antenna

1 improvised bowling alley in the basement

Many, many games of cribbage

So much laughter, tears, and human connection

In Shiocton itself:

491 households ordered to evacuate

1 million pounds of sand

60,000 sand bags

1,100 volunteer hours over 10 days to sort donated goods

287 vehicles filled with clean up, hygiene, and food supplies

We also have collected more than \$24,000 and in the coming days we'll be working to figure out how to get that into people's hands for immediate recovery needs. We aren't the big, long-term funding folks, but our communities raised this money (with gifts from all over the world) to help with whatever folks need in this moment. People had expenses during the evacuation, lost food and many were out of work.

I'll write more when we have a plan for distribution, and whatever funds we don't give out will be given to the ongoing work of the Shiocton-Bovina Fire Department for their recovery efforts. If you still want to give to the fund at St. John's UCC, you're more than welcome, and there are recovery funds through the Wisconsin Conference United Church of Christ and the Shiocton-Bovina Fire

Department as well as other organizations like Red Cross, Salvation Army, and United Way.

One final word ... please, be careful sharing pictures of homes without the permission of the residents. I've been careful to only take pictures of empty lots, farm fields, the airport, and such. There were some very hard days in shelter when people saw their homes on drone footage. These are people's lives, their security in the world, and they were taken from them. No one's life deserves to be a spectacle, something for others to gawk at.

My deepest thanks to our parish:

St. John's United Church of Christ Black Creek

Trinity United Church of Christ of Shiocton (Leeman)

St. John's United Church of Christ of Cecil

It was truly a team effort for all three of our churches.

And thanks will never be enough for all the people who donated, volunteered, sorted, cooked, prayed, and were with us in so many different ways. I'm sorry I don't have everyone's names, but know that I hold all of you in my heart, and I am so grateful and proud for who we are together.

With thanks again to:

Jenni Court and the Black Creek Fire & Rescue

Cindy Meulemans and the Salvation Army Bread of Life Center

Sharon Holt and the Red Cross

Peace and grace,

Pastor Moira

Give to flood relief:

♥ through St. John's U.C.C. Black Creek:

<https://stjbcucc.breezechms.com/give/online>

♥ through the Wisconsin Conference UCC (check drop down for Wisconsin Flooding) <https://onrealm.org/wcucc/-/form/give/hurricane>

♥ through Shiocton-Bovina Fire Department at Wolf River Community Bank (phone 920-779-7000 and routing number 075972105)